

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-13 /075 W

-----251400Z 107523 /53

R 251100Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4248

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CAIRO 6888

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJ: DISCUSSION ON LEBANON WITH ASAAD AL-ASAAD

SUMMARY: SHI'A NOTABLE ASSAD AL-ASSAD BELIEVES
TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADERSHIP DISCREDITED IN SOUTHERN
LEBANON WITH RESULTANT INCREASE IN COMMUNIST INFLUENCE
THERE. ASAAD MAINTAINED THAT THIS LEADERSHIP GAP IS CORE OF
PROBLEM IN SOTHERN LEBEON WHICH IN NEED OF COMPREHENSIVE
"PLAN" TO CREATE NEW MODERATE MUSLIM LEADERSHIP RESPONSIVE
TO POPULAR NEEDS. ASAAD SUGGESTED THAT PRES SARKIS MIGHT
SUSPEND CHAMBER OF DUPITIES AND UNDERTAKE DRASTIC ELECTORAL
REFORMS IN EFFORT TO REDUCE CURRENT CONFESSIONAL TENSIONS
IN SOUT AND IN LEBANON AS A WHOLE. ASAAD ASKED WHAT
USG REACTION MIGHT BE WERE SARKIS TO UNDERTAKE SUCH DRASTIC
ELECTORAL REFORMS. END SUMMARY

1. AL ASST SYG ASSAD AL-ASAAD CALLED ON ME AT HIS REQUEST

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APRIL 23 TO DISCUSS DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON.
ASAAD, WHO UNCLE OF LEBANESE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES SHI'A
SPEAKER KAMIL AL-ASAAD AND IS FROM THE TAYIBAH IN THE
SOUTH, WAS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH LEADERSHIP VACUM
AMONG SOUTHERN LEBANESE MUSLIMS AND RESULTANT GAINS BY COM-
MUNIST FACTIONS AMONG YOUTH IN SOUTH. ASAAD OPINED THAT
TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH HAD NOT STOOD BY

MUSLIM POPULARION DRUGIN TRAUMATIC EVENTS OF PAST FOUR YEARS, WHILE LEFTISTS HAD ADOPTED CAUSE OF VICTIMS OF ISRAELI AND CRHISTIAN ATTACKS AND HAD PUMPED MONEY INTO SOUTH. PROBLEM IN SOUTH NOT SO MUCH PALESTINAN PRESENCE, ASAAD DECLARED, AS RELUCTANT TURN OF BASICALLY NON-LEFTIST LOCAL POPULATION TO LOCAL "COMMUNISTS" AS MEANS OF SELF-DEFENSE.

2. ASAAD DECLARED THAT HE HAD OF LATE BEEN URGING UPON PRES SARKIS , AS WELL AS ON PRES SADAT AND PRINCE FAHD, A "PLAN" , BOTH FOR LONG AND SHORT TERM, TO RESTORE SOCIAL CHOESION AND JUSTIC TO SOUTHERN MUSLIMS VIA CREATION OF A NEW SOUTHERN MUSLIM LEADERSHIP CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE. ASAAD NOTED SADLY THAT, ALTHOUGH SYRIANS RECOGNIZE LEADERSHIP GAP IN SOUTH, SARG AT PRESENT ATTEMPTING TO REPLACE GROWING COMMUNIST INFLUENCE WITH BAATH PARTY IDEOLOGY, WHICH NOT WHAT LOCAL MODERATES HAVE IN MIND. SAUDIS APPEAR COMMITTED TO TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADERS FROM SOUTH AND THUS FAR SAUDI RESPONSE TO GROWING COMMUNIST INFLUENCE HAS BEEN TO CHANNEL MORE MONEY INTO SWISS BANK ACCOUNTS OF TRADTIONAL LEADERS. EGYPT ESSENTIALLY POWERLESS TO INFLUENCE LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS AT PRESENT, EXCEPT VIA SAUDIS.

3. ASAAD NOTED THAT PRES SARKIS WELL AWARE THAT TRADTIONAL MUSLIM LEADERSHIP NO LONGER REPRESENTS PEOPLE, EVEN OUTSIDE SOUTH, BUT DOES NOT DARE TO ADMIT THIS PUBLICLY, AS CLASH WITH CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, WHERE TRADTIONAL LEADERS ENTRENCHED, WOULD ENSUE. ASAAD ASKED WHAT USG REACTION WOULD BE IF SARKIS WERE TO DISSOLVE CHAMBER AND TO SUSPEND "THE CON-CONFIDENTIAL

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STITUTION" FOR PREHAPS TWO YEARS. IN THIS REGARD, ASAAD NOTED THAT CONFESSIONALISM HAD ONLY BECOME SERIOUS PROBLEM IN LEBANON 1950'S, DURING TENURE OF PRES CHAMOUN, WHO HAD CHANGED FIVE LARGE (AND THUS CONFESSIONALLY MIXED) ELECTORAL DISTRICTS CREATED IN 1943 INTO MULTIPLICITY OF DISTRICTS EACH WITH A CLEAR CONFESSIONAL MAJLRITY. ASAAD RECALLED THAT, BEFORE CHAMOUN'S CHANGES, MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS IN EACH OF FIVE DISTRICTS HAD HAD TO DEPEND UPON EACH OTHER FOR ELECTION AND CONFESSIONAL LINES WERE BECOMING CLURRED TO EXTENT THAT CONFESSIONALISM WOULD SOON HAVE CEASEDDDD TO BE ISSUE.

4. ASAAD NOTED THAT A RETURN TO FORMER ELECTORAL DISTRICTS, AFTER A COUPLE OF YEARS TO ALLEVIATE SHOCK OF RECENT FIGHTING, MIGHT MAKE SERIOUS INROADS ON LEBANON'S CONFESSIONAL PROBLEMS WITHIN THREE YEARS. IF PRES SARKIS WERE TO ENACT SUCH ELECTORAL REFORMS, ASAAD NOTED, MANY CONCERNED, SOUTHERN LEBANESE MODERATES, HIMSELF INCLUDED, WOULD RETURN TO SOUTH TO ESTABLISH CONTACTS WITH LOCAL POPULACE PRIOR

TO NEW ELECTIONS.

5. I TOLD ASAAD THAT, AS A MATTER OF POLICY, USG IS COMMITTED TO THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF LEBANON. WE HAVE MADE THIS CLEAR TO ALL. WE SHARE THIS VIEW THAT, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE LEBANESE MUST COME TO AN AGREEMENT AMONGST THEMSELVES AND ARE SUPPORTING PRES SARKIS' EFFORTS TO MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION WE HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE SYCANS, SUADIS AND ISRAELIS ABOUT LEBANON IN GENERAL AND THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON IN PARTICULAR. WE WILL CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO WORK TO EASE EXISTING TENSIONS IN LEBANON AND TO ENCOURAGE THE REESTABLISHMENT OF A SOUND POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE. WE HAVE ALWAYS RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR SOCIAL REFORM, BUT BELIEVE THIS IS SOMETHING WHICH THE LEBANESE MUST THEMSELVES DECIDE. I SAID I DID NOT KNOW WHAT PRES SARKIS HAS IN MIND, BUT WONDERED WHETHER HE IS AT PRESENT STRONG ENOUGH TO UNDERTAKE

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THE TYPE OF RADICAL CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS THAT ASAAD WAS ADVOCATING, ASAAD REPLIED THAT SARKIS WOULD BE STRONG ENOUGH, ASSUMING THAT HE HAS SUPPORT OF SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA, AND EGYPT (AND TACITLY OF US) IN SUCH A VENTURE.

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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6. COMMENT: ASAAD NOTED THAT HE HAD BEEN IN LEBANON PREVIOUS WEEK AND HAD HAD DINNER WITH PRES SARKIS. ASAAD GAVE NO INDICATION AS TO WHETHER IDEA OF SUSPENSION OF CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES WAS HIS IDEA OR WHETHER SUBJECT RAISED DURING DISCUSSION WITH SARKIS. ASAAD APPEARED PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS FOR USG TO COORDINATE POLICY ON LEBANON WITH SAUDIS (ONLY COUNTRY ENJOYING MODICUM OF "RESPECT" FROM BOTH MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS). ASAAD ALSO NTED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE WILLING TO GIVE UP AL POST AND TO RETURN TO LEBANON AS "SIMPLE SOLDIER" IN FIGHT TO SAVE SOUTH FROM COMMUNIST INFLUENCE. ALL THAT IS NEEDED IN CHESIVE PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH AND , PROBABLY, OPPOUTNITY FOR ASSAAD TO RETURN TO RESCTUCTURED CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES.

7. AMBASSADOR PARKER BEST ABLE TO EVALUATE VALIDITY ASAAD AL-ASAAD'S COMMENTS AND LATTER'S STRENGHT IN SOUTH LEBANON.

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